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IT is little to our credit, and ranks among the idiosyncrasies of literature, that three of the best works on American history, if not the three very best within their by no means limited range, should be by Britons: Bryce's "American Commonwealth," Trevelyan's "American Revolution," and now Mr. Frederick Scott Oliver's "Alexander Hamilton: An Essay on American Union."* The reason cannot be because a long perspective is necessary for historical building, for British historians have dealt as adequately with native blocks and teeming foregrounds; nor can it be that the calm judicial mind of a foreigner can best interpret a young country's struggle from chaos into national life, giving all the heroic surgeons their rightful niche, throwing the limelight upon achievements and events of the most significance to posterity; for we have calm judicial minds of our own, and no other foreigner save the Briton has ever written of us with a complete intelligence and sympathy. I fancy that a greater personal leisure and the inherited method of treating history in a spirit of serious and noble deliberation, combined with the larger vision acquired by contemplation of a deep historic background of infinite variety, explain the phenomenon in a measure; to say nothing of the sap that, welling from a common root, inclines the ancient tree to regard with an indulgent and paternal sympathy its precocious shoot across the way.

American historians, with few exceptions, are without repose in their style (dulness is no substitute), and that lofty attitude of mind and wide vision that leave the accident of personal nationality out of the question. The reason is, not only that the hurry of a young country sends its waves even to the study, but that, in nine cases out of ten, our histories and biographies have been turned out on the order of a publisher or to meet the requirements of a "series." Generally, they are intolerably dull, cut and dried, lacking altogether the warm human magnetism and the aristocratic leisure that make the best work of the British historians so delightful. When I was writing my own study of Hamilton, I was obliged to drink quarts of tea in order to wade through the published biographies of him. Never was a man so unfortunate in his would-be interpreters. Saving his son, whose pen was dipped in drab and who escaped an absolute

* "Alexander Hamilton: An Essay on American Union." By Frederick Scott Oliver. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

neutrality by the violence of his prejudices alone, I found all of Hamilton's biographers perfunctory, bored, utterly without insight and sympathy. His wonderful personality seemed to have hidden itself with his dust in Trinity Churchyard, and those commissioned to write of him merely boiled down John Hamilton's mountain of words—drinking quarts of tea, no doubt—recognizing nothing beyond the bare bones of his achievements, and, while giving a few lines to the romantic circumstances of his birth, making not the slightest effort to dissipate one of the most interesting mysteries in history. No wonder Hamilton lay forgotten for a hundred years, and even for long after the three or four provocative lines in the "American Commonwealth"; although one might have fancied that the many fine paintings of him would have talked their own story into a thousand brains as ardent and sympathetic as his own.

Had Mr. Oliver's book appeared fifty years ago, Hamilton would have continued to be as vivid a beacon-light for coherence as Jefferson has been for disintegration; for high impersonal ideals, as his arch-enemy has been for the Declaration of Independence gone mad. Hamilton was by far the truer Democrat of the two—as a young student of Knox College demonstrated during last year's annual debate at the Hamilton Club of Chicago—because he had the good of the entire Republic at heart, was absolutely catholic and impartial in his arrangement of the nation's affairs, while bending all his energies toward making it so compact and solid that it should be impervious to assault without and within. His mind was universal, impersonal, unselfish; Jefferson's was sectional, beset by fads and enthusiasms, but with a gift of pose and prose that has enabled him to drive the illogical masses in the United States even to this day.

Nothing could have counteracted this pernicious force in American affairs, and enabled us to approach within a measurable distance of an ideal republic, but the persistence of the spirit of Hamilton, the ever-present realization that the entire country ran on his wheels, that its prosperity and greatness, its primal impulse of energy,—an energy in which we take a not too modest pride,—sprang from his brain; nothing but the inspiration of his extraordinary life, from nameless boyhood to the making of a nation destined to have no rival but Great Britain; of his poverty, his honesty, his free and ardent gift of the best that was in him, that a

loose cluster of States, abominably beset in every vital inch by as unpatriotic a people as history records, should be dragged from disease to health, wounds stitched, wrenched-off members strapped to the trunk, become a nation, and the nation have at least a chance for its life. And during a long and critical period, when we had so much need of him again, he was buried under a mountain of débris.

There is no life of which we have any record as inspiring as Hamilton's; and, to repeat, could Mr. Oliver's biography have appeared long since, it would have been an incalculable boon to the country. It is so broad, so generous, so just to both sides in its analysis of the great struggle for liberty, its estimates of all the actors in that picturesque drama, it is so evidently a labor of love in an infinite leisure, above all so classic in style, and so interesting as mere reading, that, in an era when the American public was more addicted to serious books than now, it would have become a handbook at once and exerted a powerful influence.

But it by no means comes too late. I am told that Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill's really remarkable life of Lord Randolph Churchill has not sold a sufficient number of copies in the United States to pay for the typesetting. If that be true, the American public ought to be ashamed of itself; and there could hardly be a sadder commentary on the frivolity and shallowness of mind which concentration upon purely material things has bred, than in this neglect of a psychological and historic revelation of importance to all men, and of a fascinating story told in a literary style of the first order. There is, however, at the present moment, a second reason for the neglect of such a book. Since the war with Spain, the people of the United States have been so infatuated with themselves that they have taken no interest, literary or otherwise, in mere outlanders. This new ego, as rampant and vulgar as the yellow-rich, has bestowed an unprecedented popularity upon some of the dullest historical novels and social studies ever written, transformed Americanism into rank provincialism, and driven more than one man and woman, bored to extinction, out of the country.

But this very apotheosis of self will save Mr. Oliver's book from the fate of Mr. Churchill's. After all, Hamilton, even though denied the felicity of being born on the sacred soil of the future United States, became indisputably an integral part of

American life; and when the country awakes to the knowledge that it would have been considerably less without him, the day of his deification will not be far off. Meanwhile, the better class of Americans, those that ever hold themselves aloof from the periodical nonsense of their fellows, will welcome this book of Mr. Oliver's, not only as one of the few adequate biographies, and an almost inspired piece of literary workmanship, but as an illuminating account of a man and a period so often the victims of biased minds and indifferent pens.

But it has a still more significant chance of taking immediate rank as a classic. I hear constantly of Hamilton clubs being formed by young men all over the United States, frequently receive letters announcing an intention to make of the life and work of Hamilton a serious study as a preparation for the career of politics and the further dissemination of his precepts. These young men will be the first to welcome Mr. Oliver's book, and it will play a large part in their development; impressing them, as it cannot fail to do, with the fairness of its estimates; whereas the same deductions in the work of an American might, knowing the intense bias of most of our writers, leave them open to doubt.

I have only one criticism to offer, or rather one correction. Mr. Oliver, on page 15, remarks that it is impossible to accept Hamilton's illegitimacy as a matter of certainty. There is not the slightest doubt of it, as I demonstrated in the preface to "A Few of Hamilton's Letters." An examination of the Protocol of the Dealing Court in Christianstadt for the year 1768 (Archives of Copenhagen, Iceland Division) set this question at rest forever; the language, more legal than polite, is final. I insist upon this point, not only because it makes the career and achievements of Hamilton the more remarkable, but because it is of the greatest value psychologically in interpreting his singular and complex character.

GERTRUDE ATHERTON.

THERE have appeared this year two noteworthy books, which together trace the history of the *university* from its origins in mediæval times to its evolved life, divers activities and problems in the present time and in our country. The first of these is Professor Friedrich Paulsen's work, in English translation, on